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Intelligence flaws cited in invasion

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WASHINGTON — U.S. forces seriously underestimated Cuban strength on Grenada, based their assaults on tourist maps and, at least in some cases, didn't know which side the Grenadian army was on, American officials and returning troops now acknowledge.

Further, Cubans on the island reportedly were tipped off to the invasion 24 hours in advance, greatly adding to the danger faced by U.S. troops.

The problems, say members of Congress and the invaders themselves, included a lack of intelligence about the size, arms, commitment and location of enemy forces.

Those shortcomings may have led U.S. invasion leaders to drop paratroopers into anti-aircraft fire, to have slowed operations on the ground, and to have made administration leaders overly optimistic that U.S. troops could be removed

within a week.

Asked Friday why U.S. troops expected 500 Cuban construction workers on Grenada but encountered instead an estimated 1,100 well-armed Cuban combatants, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger acknowledged the intelligence weakness.

"I suppose because it [the armed buildup of Cuban forces] was carried on clandestinely," said Weinberger. "We don't have any representation on the island. We did not have any way of really determining this."

In addition, U.S. intelligence sources told the Associated Press that Cuba had been tipped off to the U.S. attack 24 hours before it began.

The intelligence sources, speaking on condition they not be identified, told the AP that the tip was an "unintentional" leak from one of the six Caribbean nations that joined the United States in the venture. They refused to say which of the six — Antigua, St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Vincent, Jamaica and Barbados — was to blame.

Castro sent colonel

Cuban President Fidel Castro did not send reinforcements to Grenada, the sources said, but he did dispatch an Army colonel to direct the island's defense.

This went undetected by U.S. forces, and the reason, according to three congressmen, may have been this: The Central Intelligence Agency had no spies on Grenada until Monday. According to two other

sources close to Caribbean intelligence operations, the lone U.S. spy on Grenada was captured and disappeared sometime between Oct. 14 and Oct. 21.

Another story offered privately by administration officials is that the United States had an informant among the medical students at St. George's College of Medicine. But the medical students were confined to the school's two campuses after Oct. 14. The beefing-up of Grenada's defenses came after that date, Pentagon officials say.

Whatever the reason for ill-preparedness, these were among the hazardous and comic results:

- A Marine platoon leader approached his commander, saying he had a man in his unit who could help "with the native language," according to a Washington Post report. Grenadians speak English.

- Another platoon leader, at midday Tuesday, approached Miami Herald correspondent Don Bohning to ask, "Can you tell us what's going on? Is the Grenadian army with us or against us?"

- Some invasion units patrolled with only tourist maps of the rugged, complex Grenadan terrain for guidance, according to ABC News.

- Army Ranger paratroopers apparently dropped into hostile and unexpected anti-aircraft fire Tuesday at Point Salines airport.

- Initially, top Defense Department

officials described the Cuban forces on Grenada as "construction workers" who would be treated as neutrals. On Friday, after they had offered strong resistance, Adm. Wesley McDonald, commander of the Grenada operation, described them as "well-trained, professional soldiers" who had been "impersonating construction workers."

24-hour estimate

And there were serious consequences. In initial briefings Tuesday, Pentagon officials, apparently relying on dated intelligence, sug-

gested Grenadian troops were modestly armed and that the military operation might be concluded in 24 hours.

Terrence Daly, 21, of Alexandria, Va., one of the 6,000 troops involved in the assault, called his mother Tuesday night from Fort Bragg, N.C.

"They're shipping me to Grenada," said Daly, unaware of the tough combat ahead. "They've given me a flak jacket, a rifle and 100 rounds of ammunition."

But servicemen returning from the front said recounted the stiff resistance encountered. 1st Lt. Michael Andre Menu, 34, of Portland, Maine, recalled, "We were fighting against very highly armed people, with armored personnel carriers that were jammed full of ammunition," said Menu, now recovering at the naval hospital at Charleston, S.C., from a shrapnel wound to his arm. "Yes, sir, they were waiting for us."

Other injuries, and perhaps deaths, may have resulted from the parachute drop into enemy fire; the Defense Department has not released details of how casualties happened. The normal procedure when dropping parachutists is to silence hostile fire first, a course readily available in Grenada had gunships from the nearby carrier USS Independence been employed.

Not enough intelligence

McDonald admitted here Friday, "I didn't have enough intelligence." But, he continued, "I don't think there was a failure there. You have to look at the total perspective. An assault on an island such as Grenada is not something we are geared to do. We did not have as much intelligence as I, as force commander, would like to have."

McDonald and White House spokesman Larry Speakes on Friday became the first administration officials to admit that the United States might face protracted resistance from Cuban and Grenadian troops in the island's hills and jungles.

How they did so well, and the United States so poorly, is a question for William J. Casey, director of the CIA. He will discuss the adequacy of intelligence in Grenada with some skeptical senators next week, at the invitation of Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D., N.Y.), vice chairman of the intelligence committee.